

PLAY:





from infancy to age five

Play is a developmental process that involves many aspects of growth. As children play and mature, they grow physically, intellectually, socially, and emotionally. Whether a child is five months or five years old, play is the best tool for fostering learning.

Children love to play. At different ages their play styles and interests grow and change. There are many ways you can facilitate their growth. Babies will benefit from playing with you. Laughing, singing, and cooing to babies are early beginnings of social play experiences for them. Also, a variety of toys and play objects for them to explore facilitates their eye-hand, motor, and intellectual development.

Older children will enjoy your participation in their play themes and ideas. Your involvement can enrich their play while communicating to them that their play is important. Also, providing props, toys, and time for them to interact with each other is important.

Here is a chart to help you understand your children's play at different ages and stages of development. Knowing what to expect can help you plan play experiences that are appropriate and fun for your kids.

AGE	GENERAL DEVELOPMENT	SOCIAL PLAY
INFANTS TO 18 MONTHS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Major advancements in physical development (walking) Major developments in language (talking) Is learning about the world, especially through taste and sight 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plays alone and with no regard to other babies Laughs during play Enjoys looking at self in mirror Peek-a-boo and pat-a-cake are favorite games
18 MONTHS TO 3 YEARS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This age group is very curious Walking is a new means of independence and a great way to explore everything Experimentation with the joys of language — especially the word <i>no</i> Temper tantrums 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parallel play: Children play with similar toys — like pails in the sand — but don't interact while playing Play on their own Will not share May take toys from others
3 TO 4 YEARS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Like to please adults Very independent and begin to assert independence Still some tantrums and the need to say "no!" Interested in other children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Associative play: Children play together, talk to each other while playing, and engage in a common play activity Play intentions are still different Sharing is still a difficult behavior
4 TO 5 YEARS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask lots of questions Children at this age are extremely egocentric — they view things only from <i>their</i> perspective Imaginary friends are big with this age group Very active; often destructive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cooperative play: Children play with others and can wait their turn Three or more children play together Sharing is a common behavior Children may have a common play goal

PHYSICAL PLAY	COGNITIVE PLAY	AGE APPROPRIATE TOYS	WHAT YOU CAN DO
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Baby is gaining control of body: crawling, standing, trying to walk Follows the movements of objects with eyes Hits, holds, and drops objects Baby is exploring her environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Baby repeats banging and sucking movements Imitates sounds and facial expressions Learning characteristics of toys Baby plays with one toy at a time and can control it 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rattles and mobiles Bars to hold onto when learning to walk Pots to bang Mirrors Water toys and soft blocks (with holes) Light ball between 8" and 24" in diameter Plastic containers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Give baby lots of crawling room Spend time playing with baby Provide different types of sensory stimulation Facilitate baby's self-awareness with mirror and peek-a-boo games
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stands, walks, and turns pages of a book Uses large and small muscles Kicks and rolls a ball, pulls a wagon, and rides a small trike or big wheels Chases other children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Functional play: Child's play is thought through — ordering, gathering, and dumping objects/materials Children use <i>more</i> than one toy at a time Trying out new roles and situations through fantasy play Pretend themes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Balls Books with cloth pages Toy phones Wagons Beads to thread Unit blocks Play corner and simple play props 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage children to play together Allow children to make choices about what they wish to play with Provide lots of small and gross motor toys Encourage children to play out fantasies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children like to balance and tip-toe Love moving to music rhythmically Climbing steps and small ladders Kicking a ball, and catching a large ball are favorite activities Jumping is fun 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Constructive play: The child builds structures Uses materials such as blocks, paints, and clay to make things Children engage in pretend play — taking on the role of a familiar person such as mom or dad 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dress up props of familiar people for dramatic play Unit blocks, duplo blocks, and snap blocks Balance beams and slide Ladder structures Playdough, crayons, sand Dolls 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage children to experiment with creative materials Allow children to make choices Encourage and support fantasy play Allow lots of physical activity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enjoy chasing games and obstacle courses Ride small bikes with training wheels Can button shirts and tie shoes Skip, hop, run, skip rope, and do puzzles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Involvement in constructive play more than 50 percent of the time Role playing is based on more complex and less familiar people and situations (often based on fiction such as superheroes, ghosts, etc.) Complex structures are built (blocks, clay) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Blocks, legos, sand, water, and wood work A bike with training wheels and scooters Climbing structures Fantasy play props Tape recorders and musical instruments Puzzles and dolls 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use props and stories to encourage fantasy play Avoid sex role stereotyping in fantasy play Help children share and take turns Provide choices rather than "you must..."